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WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A SHELTER PET

Your new dog or cat likely comes with a mysterious background. While you may never know the circumstances that ultimately led your new friend to the shelter, then to your home, it's important that you understand how those circumstances might impact the animal's behavior once you bring him home, and how to address those behaviors if they occur.

Some rescued pets will be content and confident right from the point of adoption. But it's not unusual for a rescued pet to be anxious and ill at ease in his new home—pacing, vocalizing and the like. This is normal behavior. Your new pet has been uprooted and doesn't yet realize his new home is permanent. Plenty of loving attention should help put him at ease.

If your new pet has a history of abuse or was never properly socialized, he may have fear issues, which manifest, for example, in a fear of men, loud noises or other dogs. These pets do best in calmer, quieter environments. They may benefit greatly from working with a trainer or behaviorist who can help with socialization and confidence-building exercises. Look for a trainer who uses positive training techniques.

Prepare for house-soiling accidents at first, even with adult pets who were previously housetrained. The best way to prevent accidents is to keep your pet close to you and provide ample opportunities to go outside to eliminate. Don't leave your pet alone in the house until you have established a schedule and routine for going outdoors to eliminate.

Above all, be patient. Give your new pet time to adjust. It can easily take a month for a rescued animal to feel comfortable and secure in his new home, with members of his new family. After an adjustment period, the best qualities of your adopted dog or cat will begin to emerge. And that's when the fun really begins!

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